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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Bizarre excuse to not stop child marriages

Loss of judicial power does not prevent from taking action

CHILD marriage – despite the caveat in the new amendment of the law – remains illegal in the country. Last Friday, as eight under-age girls were about to be married off in Dinajpur, locals informed the local administration. But no action was taken by the UNO. In Narayanganj, an underage girl was married off on Sunday, but despite locals protesting, the upazila administration refused to intervene. A report by this paper yesterday cited more similar cases.

We know that the Act makes it mandatory for local administration to take action to stop child marriage. Section 4 of the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 states that it is the duty of the UNO and other local government officials to prevent child marriages. Yet, with the most bizarre farce of an excuse, officials are now saying that they cannot take any action despite being informed of them, because the court has declared mobile courts illegal.

It is clear that either the UNOs are using this as an excuse to not act, lamenting the loss of judicial powers that mobile courts gave them, or they are simply ignorant of the difference between administrative and judicial functions. Stopping the marriage in question is an administrative function. Sentences and punishment are the domain of the judiciary.

There is no logic to their claim: preventing a crime from taking place using the power vested in their office by the law does not require judicial power. We cannot but wonder if these local government officials are allowing child marriages knowingly as leverage to demand reinstatement of mobile courts. We must urge that top level administration not only clarify the situation but also investigate why these officials refused to comply with the law and prevent the child marriages.

Raintree hotel illegal

Where was Rajuk all this time?

IT took a sensational double-rape in a posh boutique hotel to wake Rajuk up from its slumber that Raintree hotel was operating, and that too illegally, in a residential area. Indeed, we are told that the top two floors of the nine-storey building are illegal. Although Raintree obtained a stay order on a High Court order, why hadn't Rajuk taken any action on the illegally constructed part of the hotel? This whole incident has basically blown off the lid on how arrangements can be made with authorities to operate, in violation of the law, by business establishments that continue their operations with impunity.

Although Rajuk has now gone into overdrive, we would like to know whether any investigation has been launched to find out why Rajuk took no steps to demolish the illegally constructed part of the hotel. Again, how is it that this hotel had access to water, electricity and gas connections on commercial basis? Does that mean there is graft involved with the utility companies? How could the utility companies give permission to establish connections to a building that is not legally permitted to have commercial-grade power, water and gas connections? The High Court stay order by the owner against a Rajuk drive for eviction notwithstanding, one simply cannot overlook the issue of graft that seems to have engulfed our state-owned companies and until we can figure out how to tackle this systemic problem, such violations are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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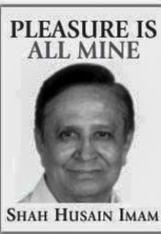
Building a society fit for children

Approximately 43 percent of our 160 million population are minors, of which 13 percent are deprived of their rights. Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in August 1990, marking the rights of a child to life, survival and development on the national agenda. Despite this, outdated legislation, inadequate policies and poor services continue. The first role of the government is to increase the budget for child development. The community and government should work collaboratively to build a supportive environment for children and help spread word about child rights through different media. The government must ensure that as many children as possible are registered at birth, thereby ensuring their access to education, healthcare and other social and legal services. Finally, they must also enforce stronger implementation of child protection laws to eradicate child abuse as effectively as possible.

Meanwhile, schools in our country need to adopt a more holistic curricula and encourage children's participation in areas that are crucial to their development. Parents and teachers should guide students towards understanding their rights. The duties of humanitarian organisations lie in improving early treatment and diagnosis of children's health issues, facilitating their access to immunisation, implementing initiatives that help orphans and disabled, underprivileged children, and supporting corporations that develop socially responsible policies for workers and their children. We must bring an end to child labour. As a community, we all have different roles in helping the children of our country. We need to take up the responsibility of fulfilling those roles.

Students of Aga Khan School, Dhaka

A scary glimpse of malware havoc?



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

SINCE last week, the world has woken up to the "largest Ransomware attack in internet history." Its unprecedented and extensive nature has had

cyber forensic experts (still caught on a learning curve!) and remediation alliances working over time to get to the bottom of it.

According to a top US official, after disruptions affecting networks worldwide, 300,000 computers had been affected. But the infection rates have slowed down since peaking last week even though a second spell has not been ruled out.

Pointing to the fallout, which is still unfolding, a top Europol executive told the BBC that as many as 150 countries have been affected. When you think of that many countries being impacted, the contamination of 300,000 computers as indicated in the US sounds like an understatement. It may have been just an initial interim assessment; yet the collateral damages to the institutions couldn't be trifled with.

It's concerning that Bangladesh is on the list of the affected. Hardly a surprise, recalling the Bangladesh Bank cyber heist which hogged international headlines. Actually, a hundred cases of ransomware attacks have been reported in Bangladesh until Tuesday evening, according to a prominent financial daily.

In their quest for unravelling the latest cyber hacking mystery (which was perhaps just waiting to happen), experts tend to categorise the phenomenon under two broad heads: State-sponsored cyber invasions and criminality induced hacks.

Examples of state sponsored hackings are centred around Russia's purported intrusions into US presidential Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton's electoral campaign to favour Trump candidacy in the November polls. Also, suspicions have been expressed in the public domain about attempted hackings into the election campaigns of present French president Emanuel Macron and that of



SOURCE: ATNEWS

German presidential hopeful Angela Merkel.

We have also seen how classified information has been played ping-pong with. Hillary Clinton was faulted for using official server on her email account in breach of trust. By a strange turn and twist, it is now President Trump who has declassified the contents of his conversations with Putin. Mrs. Clinton's indiscretion, her supporters will claim, pales before that of Trump declassifying documents before the stipulated time period.

State secrets are perhaps less sacrosanct now than they used to be, encouraging cyber hacking in a context diluted by inter-personal relationships.

Knowledgeable circles have come to believe that a criminal underworld of the internet is growing - immersed in a devil's workshop, experimenting with malwares to break into a system. They have given it a picturesque name viz "darkware world". Like an underground economy, there's an underground internet.

For considerations of credibility and

social responsibility, as conduits of communication, Facebook, Google and Apple are taking to a policy of pre-filtration of entries on to their canvas.

Now comes the big question: Who triggered the massive cyber attack, pervasively disrupting computer systems the world over? An AFP report from Washington said, "In the first clues of the origin of the massive ransomware attacks, Google researcher Neel Mehta posted computer code that showed similarities between the "WannaCry" malware and a vast hacking effort widely attributed to Pyongyang." Along the same line, Simon Choi, director of the Seoul internet security firm Hauri stated, "The code used in the latest attack shared many similarities with past hacks blamed on the North."

But Europol with a broad spectrum cyber intelligence network warns against rash judgement adding it is "too early" to say who is behind the hacks.

Well, where are we placed in an overall context? A survey conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank

Management (BIBM) has revealed the vulnerability of local banks. In the last three years, they have been subject to "cyber intrusions or attempted cyber intrusions in their IT systems." The most common mischievous activities resulting from cyber intrusion were "account takeovers (7.0 percent), identity theft (18 percent), telecommunication network disruptions (15 percent) and data integrity breaches (9.0 percent)", found a study.

One hopes that apart from nudging other important institutions into ramping up safeguards against cyber attacks, the latest wave of hacking should make financial institutions flesh up on the bare bones of their IT structures. The inadequacies are scary: "Only 22 percent of the banks have IT governance framework in place; 12 percent have for some level of IT roadmap; and frustratingly, almost 50 percent of bank auditors are not trained enough to perform IT audit properly."

The writer is a commentator on current affairs and former Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Brexit or Breakup?



CARL BILD

EVEN after abandoning its empire, the United Kingdom hesitated for decades to join Europe. But it eventually did, and in the past half-century it became a proponent of European Union enlargement, and a champion of key EU

policies such as the single market. But soon it will be one year since the UK decided, by a slim majority, to leave all of that behind. In the past 11 months, we have been told repeatedly that "Brexit means Brexit" – a phrase that leaves one none the wiser as to what Brexit actually means. But now that the UK has invoked Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon, the fog has started to lift. The UK has clarified some of its objectives for leaving the bloc, and we can begin to get a sense of how the process will play out over the next few years.

For starters, we know that the divorce will not be easy. Rather than pursuing a Norway- or Turkey-style arrangement, in which the UK would maintain some access to the single market or customs union, British Prime Minister Theresa May has opted for a "hard Brexit." She has made it clear that controlling immigration and leaving the European Court of Justice's jurisdiction are her primary objectives. And with her Conservative Party poised to win a solid majority in the general election on June 8, the UK will almost certainly stay this course.

In its negotiations with the EU, May's government will want to discuss a new UK-EU partnership alongside the terms of the divorce. But, so far, the European Council has furnished its chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, with a mandate only for the divorce stage of the process. It will not expand that mandate to include talks on a future UK-EU partnership until the first stage nears completion.

Moreover, the remaining 27 EU member states' finance ministries are demanding that the UK settle its financial obligations to the bloc, lest they get saddled with the UK's bill. There will be haggling over what the UK owes; but, as a matter of principle, the EU can hardly budge much on this issue.

Thus, one can be virtually certain that the UK will formally leave the EU by the end of March 2019, and that it will not have a final agreement on a new partnership in hand. Barring a separate agreement on some kind of transitional arrangement, the UK could be heading for a brutal exit: new tariffs, severed institutional relationships, and diplomatic tensions.

On the other hand, with such an agreement, the UK could leave with a reasonable divorce settlement that includes guiding principles for a new UK-EU partnership, to be discussed in another round of negotiations. Assuming good will on both sides, such

negotiations could possibly be concluded by 2022.

Any new partnership that emerges will most likely resemble the arrangement between Ukraine and the EU: something like the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, along with additional agreements covering complicated sectors such as transportation and agriculture. While the DCFIA was a boon to Ukraine's economy, a similar deal for the UK would represent a huge step backwards, not least because it would require a new border regime that would disrupt the integrated value chains on which many UK firms depend.

The UK will also have to establish a number of new agencies for regulatory issues that are currently being overseen by the EU, such as nuclear safety, pharmaceutical testing, aviation, and food standards. And, given that one of the UK's top priorities will be to maintain its economic relationship with the EU – no other relationship is as important – what-

are in the UK, and most of them make important contributions to the UK's economy. For example, Barclays Bank alone employs 3,000 citizens from other EU countries.

The devil will be in the details. The May government insists that it wants to control immigration, but no one really wants to see new visa barriers in Europe. Either way, many companies will have to start making adjustments, especially in the automobile and aerospace industries, which are highly integrated across borders. In fact, Lloyds of London is already establishing operations within the EU; and Goldman Sachs has announced that it is relocating some jobs away from London.

I sincerely hope that a brutal exit in the spring of 2019 can be avoided, and that the "deep and special partnership" that the UK talks about will materialise by, say, the spring of 2021. But, after some rather acrimonious conversations in recent weeks, one cannot be



PROJECT SOURCE: DEZEEN

ever new agencies it creates will have to uphold the standards that the EU will demand. Beyond that, the UK will also have to pursue individual arrangements with all of the non-EU countries that are a party to any of the Union's 48 trade agreements with the outside world.

There was once much talk about a post-Brexit free-trade deal between the United States and Britain. But enthusiasm has waned, and one now hears talk of the UK joining some kind of US-EU trade deal at a later date.

Another priority on the negotiating agenda will be the nearly five million EU citizens who have suddenly found themselves on the wrong side of the new divide, and whose immediate rights and future prospects will need to be addressed. Most of these people

confident that either outcome will come to pass.

As for the remaining EU member states, we should not lose site of the fact that we need one another. In a couple of decades, we will constitute no more than 4 percent of the global population. The EU – with a renewed Franco-German axis at its core – will have to deal with its many other challenges, and chart its own future.

The same goes for the UK, which must decide if it still wants to be a part of Europe, albeit outside of the EU; or whether Brexit actually means Breakup.

Carl Bildt is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

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